



From the Director

Welcome to the winter 2022 edition of **GRECC AdVANCES**. This edition highlights:

- A novel program for managing the complex needs of Veterans with dementia and their caregivers from Dr. Sowmya Iyer at the Palo Alto GRECC.
- Information from the Minneapolis GRECC about a power walker that may enhance mobility
- A curriculum for educating trainees and staff about frailty developed by Dr. Michael Mintzer and colleagues at the Miami GRECC.

GRECCs are leaders in the development and delivery of education in best care practices for older Veterans, so please feel free to reach out to the GRECCs featured in this edition for more details.

Finally, congratulations to Dr. Kim Garner (formerly of the Little Rock GRECC) for recognition of her Advanced Care Planning Group Visits innovation noted by the VHA Undersecretary of Health, Dr. Shareef Elnahal, in his Town Hall meeting in July.

Please share this edition with colleagues and we'll be back with more next summer.

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Power Walker May Enhance Mobility

Over 40% of older Americans cannot easily walk 400 meters. Powered seated scooters discourage healthful walking and have limitations due to size and cost.

In collaboration with the Minneapolis Adaptive Design and Engineering Program, Minneapolis GRECC Acting ADEE, Dr. Ed Ratner, used a human-centered design process to develop a novel power assisted walker (PAW). A user can push the device as a manual 4-wheeled walker or step onto a footplate and ride it as a 3-wheeled standing electric scooter, with safety enhanced by anti-tip casters. A working prototype has demonstrated the feasibility of this design. It also meets user-defined requirements for safety, usability, and transportability. A device patent has been filed.

To learn more, contact [Ed Ratner](#), MD.

PAW riding mode:

- (A) screen for speedometer and battery status
- (B) thumb throttle
- (C) bracket for controller and battery
- (D) gas strut
- (E) hub motor wheel
- (F) caster wheel for walker / anti-tip wheel for scooter





New Additions to Frailty Curriculum

The Miami GRECC's educational curriculum on Frailty has a few exciting new additions:

- A multidisciplinary team at the Miami GRECC, led by Dr. Michael Mintzer, designed and published an **8-module educational resource** on frailty: an introductory module and 7 interactive cases covering screening, diagnosis, management, and comorbidities. Prior to publication, this curriculum was evaluated by fourth-year University of Miami medical students. Evaluation included a pre-/post-test and a curriculum evaluation with questions on content, learning objectives, value of the learning, and multimedia module usability. Students' post-test performance demonstrated significant improvement ($p < .05$) in knowledge of frailty and, overall, the evaluations were very positive. The frailty modules were recently published on POGOe and have since been successfully used by medical students, residents, geriatric medicine fellows, and health professions trainees.
- **Frailty Seminar Series:** newly designed and implemented monthly webinars, jointly organized by the Miami and San Antonio GRECCs, featuring internationally renowned speakers and a worldwide audience.
- Lastly, the Miami and Gainesville GRECCs have developed a **frailty assessment workshop**, designed for primary care and rehabilitation providers and staff. This workshop was approved by VISN-8 and is slated for delivery as a "mini-residency" at each of the VISN's VAMC facilities in FY2023.

For more information, contact [Iriana Hammel](#), MD, FACP, AGSF

Tele-dementia Care for Older Veterans

Dr. Sowmya Iyer has been pursuing ways to help older Veterans with dementia access medical care from their homes via programs developed at the VA Palo Alto GRECC.

Caregivers often need help with dementia management – many live in rural settings far from medical specialists. Virtual care provides specialty dementia care access to patients with complex needs in their homes, and its uptake has increased during the pandemic.

In partnership with the VA Cleveland GRECC and Dr. Ranak Trivedi at VA Center for Innovation to Implementation, Dr. Iyer sought to better understand how tele-dementia care is helping older Veterans and their caregivers. Preliminary data suggests that most visits were for Veterans with moderately severe stages of dementia, and nearly 50% of consultations involved dementia behaviors.

Caregivers participating in a semi-structured telephone interview shared that virtual care alleviated transportation challenges, which included both physical and cognitive challenges such as difficulty entering the vehicle, following instructions, and inability to wait unsupervised while the caregiver parked. Caregivers also appreciated the limited preparation for a visit and the immediate return to usual routine afterward. Many caregivers found it easier to communicate separately with the clinician via virtual visits and felt that ideal dementia care for the future would include both virtual and in-person care options.

Contact [Sowmya Iyer](#), MD, to learn more.

